

The Breast Cancer Diet

Lower your risk of breast cancer by following some simple [food](#) rules

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Despite what many food and supplement manufacturers want you to believe, no one food or ingredient can protect you from breast cancer. But thanks to ongoing research, we have a good sense of what to eat — and avoid — to cut cancer risk.

A Plate of Prevention

First, the big picture: Choose [foods](#) and drinks that will help you reach a healthy weight and stay there. Being significantly overweight raises your risk of developing breast cancer and negatively impacts how well you'll recover from it. Eating healthfully not only helps you reach and maintain a proper weight but fills you with vital, disease-fighting nutrients — many of which are just being discovered. What should you put on your plate? Experts recommend the following:

- **Eat five or more servings of a variety of colorful vegetables and fruits** every day. Don't be shy with produce: Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Cancer Institute recommend up to 13 servings, or 6½ cups, of fruits and vegetables a day to keep us slim and to fight a range of diseases.

- **Choose whole grains** over processed (refined) grains for extra fiber to spur weight loss; these will help steady your blood sugar levels as well, and avoid insulin resistance, which can lead to diabetes.
- **Follow a low-fat diet.** Studies link a high-fat [diet](#) to more aggressive forms of breast cancer. A low-fat diet — one where 30 percent or less of your calories come from fat — also helps prevent recurrence. Choose foods with healthy fats for an extra brain- and heart-health boost: Opt for fish and nuts, for instance, over fried foods and those high in saturated fat.
- **Get antioxidants from fruits and vegetables, not supplements.** Antioxidants are nutrients — namely vitamins C and E, carotenoids and other plant compounds (phytochemicals) — that protect against cell damage that may lead to cancer. Research has shown that people who eat lots of produce, a naturally rich source of antioxidants, have a lower risk for certain cancers but that antioxidant supplements (which contain high concentrations of specific nutrients) do not reduce risk.

What to avoid?

- **Drink no more than one alcoholic beverage per day.** Some studies indicate that less — or none at all — is best for breast cancer protection. Women with estrogen-receptive breast cancer should avoid alcohol altogether due to its potential effect on estrogen. If you do drink, make sure you get adequate folic acid, or folate. Too little of this B vitamin may increase the risk of breast cancer, especially in women who drink alcohol. Leafy greens, beans, whole grains and fortified cereals are all good sources.
- **Limit intake of meats** that have been fried, barbecued, cooked well-done, preserved (by smoking or salting) or processed (like deli meats that contain nitrates). These cooking methods are linked to heightened breast cancer risk.

The jury is still out on:

- **Tea:** Some studies show that people who drink green tea, and to a lesser extent black tea, which is high in a type of antioxidant called polyphenols, have lower cancer risk. But researchers don't know if the cancer protection comes from drinking tea itself or if tea drinkers have other healthy habits that reduce their risk. (Caffeine may worsen symptoms of fibrocystic breast lumps in some women, but there is no evidence that it increases the risk of breast cancer.)
- **Organic food:** Though it is an area of debate and strong personal views, there is no conclusive evidence that eating organic reduces cancer risk. However, there may be other reasons you want to eat organic food, and it certainly won't increase your risk.
- **Vitamin D and calcium:** High levels of vitamin D and calcium may offer some protection against the most aggressive kinds of breast cancer but only in premenopausal women, emerging research shows.

Try This! Wipe out extra calories and up your antioxidant intake in one fell swoop: Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables, one quarter with a protein-rich food (chicken, beans, fish, low-fat or nonfat dairy) and the remaining quarter with starchy vegetables (sweet potatoes, corn) or whole grains (brown rice, whole-wheat bread, quinoa). Follow this 50–25–25 rule at every meal to keep your weight down and ensure you get the right balance of nutrients without counting calories or tracking servings. —Katherine Solem

<http://www.ivillage.com/breast-cancer-diet/4-a-213127?nclid=ca|07-27-2010>

